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ABSTRACT

The Professional Development Seminar (PDS), an adjunct to the freshman Orientation to Education class at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, was a conscious attempt to develop a more positive feeling of self-worth in students enrolled in their first professional development education course. PDS provides a small group, student-oriented, discussion approach to learning where content and formal discipline is minimized so that communication and interaction among students and with an instructor in a non-threatening atmosphere is maximized. A pre- and post-test was given to participants to determine change in self-concept. Although the lack of a control group placed limitations on the study, significant gains in dimensions were associated with growth in mental health during the PDS college freshman semester. (A 4-item bibliography is included.) (MJM)

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INCREASING POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT IN FRESHMEN EDUCATION STUDENTS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SEMINARS

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INTRODUCTION

Psychologists and educators are becoming increasingly aware that a person's concept of himself, or his self-concept, is intimately related to how he learns. Research indicates that student performance depends not only on how intelligent he actually is, but also on how intelligent he (the student) thinks he is. (1, 3, 4) Success in school, then, may depend less on a student's genetic qualities than on how he feels about those qualities. Each person behaves in a manner as consistent as possible with his self-concept; he "acts like" the sort of person he perceives himself to be.

Self-concept is neither an unchanging, innate personal possession nor a psychic entity which suddenly stops growing at a particular age. Self-concept can change, through the will and effort of its possessor alone, but usually in interaction with "significant others," which in educational settings include peers and teacher. The problem, then, is not whether one approves of teaching for a positive sense of self, but whether the effects of the teaching are positive or negative relative to the student's self-concept.

The Professional Development Seminar, as an adjunct to the freshmen Orientation to Education class at University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, was a conscious attempt to develop a more positive feeling of self-worth in

students enrolled in their first professional education course. The PDS is an outgrowth of the project, "Teachers for the Disadvantaged" directed by Dr. David L. Bowman, and funded jointly by the State of Wisconsin and the U. S. Office of Education. Though but one of several components in the project, the PDS proved to be an important factor in aiding project students improve their self-concept and increase their academic success. Presently the Orientation to Education course meets in large lecture one day per week and PDS sections of no more than fifteen students with one faculty member one day per week.

ACTIVITIES

PDS provides a small group, student-oriented, discussion approach to learning where content and formal discipline is minimized so that communication and interaction among students and with an instructor in a non-threatening atmosphere is maximized.

The major purpose of the seminar, as stated in the original study, is to effect in each participant a more realistic perception of self and the world around him. (2) Specific objectives are:

1. To build seminar rapport and positive social relationships
2. To build a strong identity with the School of Education
3. To provide group and individual counseling and advisement
4. To provide reading and study skill aid
5. To open channels of communication between students and faculty members
6. To develop the art of "schoolsmanship"
7. To encourage articulation improvement and develop student responsibility and leadership

Learning is personalized, non-directive, self-evaluative, and non-competitive. In such an atmosphere students learn about themselves and gain personal insights experientially through open, non-directive interaction.

DESIGN

The present study was conducted during Semester II, 1970-71, at UW-O, with over 400 students enrolled in the Orientation course. A pre- and post-test was given to determine change in self-concept. Total usable returns for data analysis were 229 and 220 for self and other, respectively. An important limitation of the study in this regard was the inability to obtain a control group for comparison purposes. Thus, conclusions must be drawn with extreme caution.

A t-test for correlated groups was computed to determine significant change.

The instrument used to measure change in self-concept was the Index of Adjustment and Values (IAV). (1) The instrument was designed to measure personal and social maladjustment variables relating to beliefs about one's self and other people. Instrument variables include perceived self (self-concept), self-acceptance, concept of ideal self, and discrepancy between self-concept and ideal self. Because feelings about self are inextricably interwoven with feelings about others, where normally mentally-healthy persons feel generally positive about themselves and others, the IAV asks respondents to rate the above categories on a number of adjectives (examples: academic, cynical, etc.) for "self" and "other," i.e., the respondent's perception of how the typical other person (peer) would fill out the instru-

ment for himself. Thus, the instrument provides eight scores (four self, four others).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Tables I and II indicate means and t-scores for each of the eight dimensions of the IAV. As shown, six of the eight scores were statistically significant.

SELF

In this aspect of the IAV, the respondent uses "self" as his reference point. He responds to the items in relation to this perception of his "self."

As indicated in Table I, student scores on three of the four "self" dimensions showed statistically significant change. Mean scores on Self-Concept increased from 183.245 to 188.603 during the semester. Such gain is significant at .001 level. The gain indicates a positive movement in self-concept development on the part of students enrolled in the PDS sessions.

TABLE I

MEAN IAV PRE- & POST-TEST SCORES,
AND COMPUTED t-SCORES FOR SELF

Self	Pre	Post	t-Score
Self-Concept (Perceived Self)	183.245	188.603	4.920 (.001)
Self-Acceptance	169.258	181.336	3.843 (.001)
Ideal Self	213.157	211.668	-1.115 (N.S.)
Discrepancy (Self-Concept, Ideal Self)	37.852	33.135	-4.758 (.001)

Self-Acceptance also showed statistically significant (.001) gain, with pre- and post-means of 169.258 and 181.336, respectively. The direction of change on this dimension indicates positive development in accepting one's self as he perceives himself to be.

Although the change in Ideal Self was not statistically significant during the semester, the direction of the change which occurred is important. PDS students showed a decrease in Ideal Self scores, indicating a bridging of the gap between perceived and ideal self. Although some difference between these two "selves" may be necessary to provide growth incentive, a wide gap between perceived and ideal self is a possible indicator of personal or social maladjustment.

The reduction of the gap between perceived and ideal self-concept was further investigated by analysis of discrepancy scores between perceived (self-concept) and ideal self. A statistically significant (.001) change was found in the direction of reducing the discrepancy between these two "selves" during the PDS semester.

OTHER

In this aspect of the IAV, the respondent is asked to use "other people" as his point of reference. He is asked to respond as he thinks "other" would complete the items for himself. The purpose is to gain some data concerning the respondent's perception of his worth, dignity, and integrity in relation to others. Further, it is expected that mentally healthy people perceive positive growth in others as they perceive such growth in themselves.

Again, three of the four dimensions of "Other" showed statistically significant changes according to Table II. "Other" self-concept increased

from a mean of 182.100 at the commencement of the semester to 188.800 at the end of the semester, a statistically significant (.001) gain indicating positive movement in perception of self-concept of others.

TABLE II

MEAN IAV PRE- & POST-TEST SCORES,
AND COMPUTED t-SCORES FOR OTHER

Other	Pre	Post	t-Score
Self-Concept (Perceived Self)	182.100	188.800	3.833 (.001)
Self-Acceptance	170.500	178.959	3.896 (.001)
Ideal Self	206.491	208.555	0.983 (N.S.)
Discrepancy (Self-Concept, Ideal Self)	33.777	30.545	-2.109 (.05)

Self-Acceptance of "Other" also showed statistically significant (.001) increase during the PDS semester, with means of 170.500 and 178.959 for pre- and post-scores, respectively.

Although change in Ideal Self was not statistically significant, and in fact showed a slight change in an unpredicted direction, discrepancy scores between Perceived and Ideal Self showed statistically significant change in the direction of reducing the gap between these two dimensions.

ACCEPTANCE OF "SELF" AND "OTHER"

Another aspect of the study included an assessment of PDS students' acceptance of self and his acceptance of others. The purpose is to gain

further data regarding the respondent's perception of his own worth, dignity, and integrity in relation to his view of other's worth, dignity, and integrity.

Four possible combinations are evident. A person may have a positive view of self and at the same time a positive view of others (++); he may have a negative view of self, but a positive view of others (-+); he may have a positive view of self but a negative view of others (+-); or he may have a negative view of self and also a negative view of others (--). From a mental health adjustment standpoint, the above categories are on a continuum from healthy to less healthy functioning.

Categories are assigned as follows: If the score for self is 172 (the mean of the norm group) or greater, the self score is (+) positive; if it is less than 172, it is (-) negative. Further, if the score for others is equal to or greater than that for self, the listing is (+) positive; if it is less than that for self, it is (-) negative. The score for self is the first of the pair; the score for others is second. Thus, the (-+) category indicates a negative view of self and at the same time a positive view of others.

Categories were devised for pre- and post-test data on the 220 UW-O students from PDS with usable returns. As indicated in Table III, it appears that students' self-regard increased, as measured by the IAV, with 50 students (22.7%) in the (++) category at the beginning of the PDS semester, and 69 students (31.4%) in that same category by the end of the semester. The (--) category, on the other hand, dropped from 33 (15.0%) to 26 (11.8%) during the semester.

The greatest change occurred in the (-+) category, which decreased from 83 (37.8%) to 58 (26.4%). Further, a gain was made in the (+-) category,

concluding with 67 (30.6%), while starting with 54 (24.5%) at the beginning of the PDS semester. Although a precise interpretation of changes in these two categories is not possible, it would appear that the direction of change in both categories could be viewed as an increase in self-regard without necessarily an accompanying change in regard for other.

TABLE III

PRE- AND POST-TEST COMPARISON OF UW-O STUDENTS

Categories		++	-+	+-	--
UW-O Pre-test	No.	50	83	54	33
	%	22.7	37.8	24.5	15.0
UW-O Post-test	No.	69	58	67	26
	%	31.4	26.4	30.6	11.8

N = 220

It is also interesting to compare UW-O pre-test data with the IAV norms established in 1952 with 564 university students. These data appear in Table IV.

In comparing percentages, it seems that the UW-O group is less positively oriented than the norm group to self and other, as expressed in the (++,--) categories. Further, the (+-) category differential (24.5% UW-O, 34.0% norm group) would indicate a possible lessening of positive regard for others.

TABLE IV

UW-O PRE-TEST COMPARED TO TEST NORMS

Categories		++	-+	+-	--
UW-O Group	No.	50	83	54	33
	%	22.7	37.8	24.5	15.0
Norm Group	No.	143	194	192	35
	%	25.4	34.3	34.0	6

UW-O N = 220

Norm Group N = 564

In view of these comparisons, it would appear that the UW-O students entering the PDS seminars in 1971 were less well-adjusted than were the college freshmen of 1952 on which the norms were based.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the lack of control in the study precludes attributing measured changes in personal variables to the independent variable (PDS) or generalizing the findings to any other population, it may be of some value to describe changes in non-statistical/numerical terms.

1. When the point of reference was self, students showed gain in important areas associated with positive mental health. At the conclusion of the PDS semester, students perceived themselves better (increased in positive self-concept), they were more accepting of themselves, and the discrepancy between perceived and ideal self was reduced. Because research is accumulating evidence indicating an important relationship between self-concept and school achievement, such gains as indicated in this study may in effect be increasing the potential of the student for greater academic achievement. (4)

2. When the point of reference was others, students again showed gain in important areas associated with positive mental health. Students perceived others more positively in self-concept and in self-acceptance, and reduced the perceived (of others) discrepancy between perceived self and ideal self. It is important to note the parallel positive changes in both "self" and "other" reference points, in that a mentally healthy person not only perceives himself positively, but also has a positive feeling toward and regard for others. Thus gains in perception of self and others are both important elements of mentally healthy persons.

3. Positive movement toward better mental health was corroborated in the changes of the (++,--) categories depicting attitude toward self and others. Less clear was the shift in (-+, +-) categories, although both could be interpreted as movement toward greater acceptance of self.

4. The UW-O students in the study were somewhat different in their regard toward self and others than the norm group of 1952. These data lead to a number of tantalizing questions:

    1. Are we looking at two different populations?

    2. Is the UW-O population of college freshmen coming to UW-O with less regard for their own self-worth and less regard for the worth of others?

    3. If (2) is true, can this be generalized to all college freshmen or is it unique to UW-O?

    4. If (2) is true, what are the implications for motivation for academic work as compared with students in the past?

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the present study identified important and significant gains in dimensions associated with growth in mental health during the PDS college freshman semester, it is impossible, as designed, to conclude a causal relationship between PDS and the gain in the mental health dimensions. An experimentally-designed study, utilizing a control group of School of Education college freshmen not involved in PDS, would provide useful comparative data.

A further area of study is needed to investigate the generalization of usefulness of a PDS-type experience for all college freshmen, and/or whether such an experience is most helpful when confined to the freshman year as opposed to providing such opportunities for students throughout their college life.

A corollary study to the above would be an investigation as to what kind of college student might benefit most from a PDS-type experience.

It is obvious that all students do not gain equally, it is likely that some gain nothing, or consider it a negative experience. Because the program is "rich" in the sense of cost as it relates to student-teacher ratios and faculty loads, it would seem desirable to gain some knowledge concerning greatest benefit, concentrating efforts on selected students on the basis of greatest need, greatest potential for growth, high risk or low risk students, or whatever criteria may be established. Further research is needed to gain baseline data on PDS-involved students before criteria may be devised and applied.

It is also obvious that all faculty members are not equally capable of facilitating a PDS-type group. More data are needed on success-related variables of faculty members involved in PDS groups.

Thus, it appears that the present research has uncovered "something" that is rich and potent for further research. Important and significant changes did take place in students during the PDS semester. If a PDS-type experience can be shown to be effective in providing positive gain on variables associated with mental health growth, such an activity is sorely needed in post-high school education at least, and at all levels of the educational ladder at best, to provide growth opportunities for students to release their true potential for self-actualization for a more fully-functioning life.

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